

Death at Jefferson

An Honors Thesis

by

Ryan M. Prendergast

Death at Jefferson:
A Requiem in Two Acts

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Thesis Advisor:
Jennifer Blackmer

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J Blackmer", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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Abstract

To complete a full-length two act play before graduation was a goal of mine as a theatre artist. After deliberation, I decided to expand on my successful one act play *Death at Jefferson*, which tells the story of the relationship that develops between high school teacher Glen Forster and his student Adam Zuklin. The one act version has received several public reading prior to this project and the two act version received a public reading in the Cave Theater at Ball State University on Friday, April 30, 2010. A talkback session followed with those in attendance. Included is a final copy of the script presented at that public reading, along with an artist's statement and a copy of the program.

Acknowledgements

(Taken from the program)

Getting *Death at Jefferson* to this point would not have been possible without three incredible people: the first is Beth Turcotte, whose tenacity in Acting for Directors and Stage Managers made me confront this story at last; the second is Wendy Mortimer, who selected its one act incarnation for the Playwriting Showcase last spring; and the last and certainly not the least is Jennifer Blackmer, who assigned a one act play final in THEAT 340 and mentored the result through the American College Theatre Festival and this thesis presentation. I needed the challenge of writing this play and I am forever in their debt.

This evening would also not be possible without the generous help of Jonathan, Nathan, Ross and Maren. I owe them much for taking time out of the last week of the semester only to make them wend their way through continuous revisions, Latin chants, Britten cantatas and heaven knows what else. I would also be remiss if I did not recognize Jonathan Jensen, Chris Chamberlain, Ben Clark and Jaclyn Hennell for their participation at the reading ACTF in Saginaw, as well as Brett Lichnerowicz, Corey Salmon, David Guiden and Rachel Fanckboner for taking part in the initial Showcase reading last May.

DEATH AT JEFFERSON
A Requiem in Two Acts

By
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CHARACTERS:

Glen FORSTER, teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School
ADAM Zuklin, his student

MALE CHORUS, who plays all subsidiary roles: Easton TRIMSTIG,
Rodney HALL, Colin CHURCHILL, MRS. Jane HALL, DEREK Liserdoni,
CHARLIE KOONZ, Male HUSTLER, etc. Differences between these
characters should be affected by means other than rapid costume
changes.

TIME
1995

PLACE
An average Midwestern Town

PROLOGUE:

A dark space. A low organ pedal sounds. A flamboyant version of Mendelssohn's "War March of the Priests" is played on an organ console illuminated upstage. A hooded apparition in black plays it. At the same time, a casket appears downstage of the organ. The music fades out. Glen FORSTER speaks from inside the casket.

FORSTER

Hello? Can anyone hear me? Anyone?

Pause.

FORSTER

(Pounding on the casket lid.)

What the hell am I doing in here? Anyone there?

Pause.

FORSTER

Goddammit! Someone! Please! PLEASE!

FORSTER pounds on the lid until it gives way. He sticks his head out.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Oh God.

He sits up.

FORSTER (cont'd)

I knew I was right. This must be hell.

He notices the audience.

FORSTER (cont'd)

I can only imagine. Where am I?

He notices the apparition at the organ.

FORSTER

Hello? Hello? Can you hear me?

The apparition does not respond.

FORSTER

Well, then. Here we are I guess. Where ever "here" is.

He pats the right side of his head.

FORSTER

Good patch up job.

He walks over to his casket. He reads from a plaque.

FORSTER

(Reading.)

"In memoria aeterna erit iustus, ab auditione mala non timebit." I'd translate that as "He shall be justified in memory everlasting, and blackened memory he need not fear." (To the audience.) Catholic school education at its finest right there. I guess I really did go through with it. Suicide, I mean. Yes, I was one of those people. I know modern society frowns on that sort of thing. And I'm Catholic, after all. I can repent. We can all repent. Is it such a crime to want to end it all? Everyone considers it at one point, and none of you dare deny it. Now in ancient Rome, suicide was a means to save family honor in the face of disgrace. I have no family to speak of, so I guess that backfired on me. But, how rude of me. It is unlike a gentleman to pontificate without an introduction. My name is Forster. Glen Forster. Like on the plaque here, Glen-

He stops and reads his name on the casket.

FORSTER

Ah, sons of bitches. They did it again! It's "FORSTER!" Not "Forester." I have no association with the trees. Forster. Sometimes known as "Forry" by my students. Oh, yes. I am- was a teacher. Music. Choir and all that. I was something of a musician, emphasis on the something. For thirty years I've worked- or rather I worked at Thomas Jefferson High School. One of those middle-class, Midwest bastions of fine public secondary education. A seething hellhole to me. Overworked, unpaid, unloved. Well, at least that's what I would tell myself. "No one loves you, Glen Forster," I would tell myself. No one. And why bother with it? A confirmed old bachelor for several years, and likely to remain so. Or so I would tell myself. But that's not why I'm here. That's because of a bullet to the brain. I wasn't man enough to try poison, pills, the noose or bleed myself to death in a tub. One day I simply decided I'd had enough of living on this cess-ridden planet, and so I used up my last paycheck- I was fired by the way. I forgot to mention that. I took my paycheck, bought a gun, and ended it all. End of story.

The apparition begins to play the "Dies Irae" on the organ.

FORSTER

(To the apparition.)

Hello? Who are you? Who are you?

No answer.

FORSTER

Is there a reason you're playing the Dies Irae? (To the audience.) Part of the Latin mass for the dead. Lost its effect after Vatican II. Some of us Catholics still held strong. (Back to the apparition) Hello?

APPARITION

(Chanting.)

"Dies irae, dies illa! Solvet saeculum in favilla!"

FORSTER

That voice.

APPARITION

"Teste David cum Sybilla!"

FORSTER

No. It can't be.

The figure continues to chant as FORSTER mounts the organ and takes off the hood. He screams.

FORSTER

No. No. No! Not you. Not you! (Up to the beyond.) Is this hell? IS THIS HELL FOR ME?

The APPARITION becomes silent. FORSTER remains distraught for several minutes.

FORSTER

(To the audience.)

I lied. The ending of the story is not so simple. That man right there is the reason I'm here. That man is to blame. That man.

The APPARITION plays a loud succession of chords.

FORSTER

(To the apparition.)

No! Not that! Stop this! STOP THIS!

Darkness consumes the stage. A lone spot illuminates FORSTER. He stands up.

FORSTER

(To the audience.)

Lord have mercy on my soul. That's all I can say. That man is only part of the reason I'm here today. Adam Zuklin is his name. Interesting name, isn't it? The rest of the blame lies with me, Glen Forster. But now it will lie forever unknown.

It died with me. But why should I deprive you of the details? My confession may illuminate you. I make no promises. Perhaps you may absolve me. Is such a thing were possible. But I suppose we must start from the beginning...

SCENE ONE: HALL DUTY

A school bell rings. It is a school morning in January. FORSTER stands on hall duty to the sound of students marching to class.

FORSTER

(Still to the audience.)

Now my life as a teacher at Jefferson was far from thrilling. Same routine, day in and day out. 7:30 to 8:00am: Hall duty.

He enters the past and speaks to several students.

FORSTER

ID! ID! I do not see your ID! Criderman, you got that ID? Good man! Take that hat off. We never wear our hats inside Thomas Jefferson School. Good morning, Miss Baker. You look wonderful! Good morning, Mr. Powell. ID! ID! I do not see your ID! We always wear our ID's at Thomas Jefferson High School! ID! ID!

Easton TRIMSTIG walks up to FORSTER, who keeps his focus on the hallway.

TRIMSTIG

Good morning there, Mr. Forster!

FORSTER

Good morning, Mr. Trimstig. How was your weekend? (To the audience.) Easton Trimstig. Band teacher. Bit of a lulu. (To a student.) ID!

TRIMSTIG

Oh perfect, as soon as my winter concert was over.

FORSTER

I am glad it went well. (To a student). Hey! I do not see your ID!

TRIMSTIG

How as your weekend?

FORSTER

Oh, fine. Just working here back in my hole. My concert is coming up. And it's the end of the semester.

TRIMSTIG

You should fix the calendar so that we end semester at Christmas.

FORSTER

Believe me, it's on my list. That way I'd actually have a Christmas break.

TRIMSTIG

Oh, you work too much, Mr. Forster. See the sun once in a while.

FORSTER

Too much work to be done, Mr. Trimstig. If Mr. Hall puts me on one more committee, I'll- (To a student.) ID!

TRIMSTIG

You even act as the school watch dog.

FORSTER

Mr. Hall says he wants me on hall duty and to make sure everyone wears their ID. And what Mr. Hall wants, Mr. Hall gets.

TRIMSTIG

You'd make a good politician, Mr. Forster.

FORSTER gives a patronizing laugh.

TRIMSTIG (cont'd)

I have a new prospect for you.

FORSTER

Okay?

TRIMSTIG

Prospective student, I mean.

FORSTER

I was going to say. I didn't know you were going into the business of procuring.

TRIMSTIG

(Laughing it off.)

Oh, no. Nothing like that at all. A prospective student from concert band.

FORSTER

Does he not like the trumpet or something?

TRIMSTIG

He's a good clarinet player, don't misunderstand me. He always talks to me about all these choral and orchestral pieces, and I always tell him he should come to you.

FORSTER

Well, varsity choir auditions for spring are this Friday. If he's interested, he should show himself.

TRIMSTIG

I'll be your humble hound dog, Mr. Forster.

FORSTER

You'll get along real well with my cats.

Another bell rings.

TRIMSTIG

That's the minute bell. Got to get to class. I'll tell Adam all about auditions.

FORSTER

I'm sure you will.

TRIMSTIG exits.

FORSTER

See you later! (Under his breath.) Philistine. (To a student.) ID! ID! ID!

Mr. Rodney HALL enters.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Good morning, Mr. Hall. (To the audience.) Mr. Rodney Hall, principal, or more like dictator. I used to call him Il Duce behind his back until he got wind of it.

HALL

Good morning, Mr. Forster. How are you?

FORSTER

Just keeping watch on your orders, sir! ID! ID!

HALL

Most of the students wearing proper identification?

FORSTER

They're all showing it.

HALL

Good. Anyone who doesn't, send down to my office.

FORSTER

Of course, sir.

HALL

I wanted to let you know that there are some budget cuts imminent.

FORSTER

What kind of-

HALL

The Superintendant hasn't disclosed the complete details yet, but I'm putting all the fine arts faculty on their guard.

FORSTER

Yes, sir. Thank you for the notice, Mr. Hall.

HALL

So. What kind of music will you have at this year's winter concert?

FORSTER

Something different this year. All sacred Catholic works. I've wanted to try this for a long time.

HALL

Why?

FORSTER

Well, because-

HALL

I don't think it's a good idea to have too much Christianity in the school's concert. Separation of church and state you know. Every year someone complains about just one church piece. A whole program? They'll be up in arms.

FORSTER

An understandable concern, but-

HALL

And are you sure an audience is going to get all that Latin gibberish? Give 'em some old fashioned tunes. Stick with what works, Mr. Forster.

FORSTER

I- Yes, of course, Mr. Hall.

HALL

Good. I also wanted to remind you that that report to Superintendant Jones needs to be on my desk by the end of the week.

FORSTER

But I thought we had until the first of the year?

HALL

I want to see it before Christmas break. Have a good day, Mr. Forster.

HALL lingers for a moment, then exits.
FORSTER mouths "ASSHOLE" after him. A
young MAN enters, carrying a heavy
backpack and several thick books in his
hands.

FORSTER
Get yourself to class young man.

The young MAN trips and drops his
books. FORSTER goes to help him.

FORSTER
Careful there, little boy.

MAN
Th--- Th--- Th- Thank y- you.

FORSTER
No prob. You're late. Get going.

The young MAN gathers his things and
exits.

FORSTER (cont'd)
That was Adam, by the way. As I was shortly to find out.

SCENE TWO: THE AUDITION

The choir classroom. FORSTER sits down
at a piano and finishes playing "DON'T
RAIN ON MY PARADE" for COLIN CHURCHILL,
an effeminate student at Jefferson.

CHURCHILL
NOBODY'S GONNA RAIN ON MY PARADE!

FORSTER
Thrilling, Mr. Churchill. (To the audience.) Long live the
Queen,,,

CHURCHILL
Really?

FORSTER
Quite an improvement on last year's audition. I couldn't get
"RING THEM BELLS" out of my head for a week.

CHURCHILL
So how soon will I know?

FORSTER

(Handing CHURCHILL's music
back.)

High noon tomorrow like every one else.

CHURCHILL

I have my sights set for first tenor this year. Mother says
my voice is wasted back in the third row.

FORSTER

I will surely reap the benefits of her remonstrations in the
fullness of time. Are there any more lambs for the slaughter
out there?

CHURCHILL

I'm the last one.

FORSTER

Thank God!

ADAM enters, carrying the score to The
Mikado.

ADAM

W-Wait! Wait!

FORSTER

Oh hell.

ADAM

E-E-Excuse me, M--M--Mr. F-F-Forster. S-S-S---orry, I'm late.

FORSTER

I've seen you around before. What's your name?

ADAM

My name is A- A-

CHURCHILL

That's Adam Zuklin. Moved here from Chicago-

FORSTER

Oh. You're Trimstig's recommendation, eh?

ADAM

Y--- Y--- If you say so.

FORSTER

Well, as always, Mr. Churchill, thanks for being on our show.
Goodbye.

CHURCHILL grabs his things and exits,
giving ADAM a glare.

ADAM

I'm s-s-sorry if I-I

FORSTER

You're a little late. Don't worry.

ADAM

Y- Yes. I- I-

FORSTER gives a resigned sigh.

FORSTER

Never mind. We're equal opportunity here after all. Let's get this out of the way. What's your song?

ADAM gives him his music.

ADAM

"I've G--- G---"

(Slapping his leg.)

"Got a Little List" from the THE MIKADO. By-

FORSTER

I know who wrote it. You sure you can handle this?

ADAM nods.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Here goes.

FORSTER plays. ADAM takes a deep breath, stands up straight and sings the song. Perfectly. Without dropping a single vowel or consonant.

ADAM

AS SOME DAY IT MAY HAPPEN THAT A VICTIM MUST BE FOUND,
I'VE GOT A LITTLE LIST - I'VE GOT A LITTLE LIST
OF SOCIETY OFFENDERS WHO MIGHT WELL BE UNDERGROUND,
AND WHO NEVER WOULD BE MISSED - WHO NEVER WOULD BE MISSED!
THERE'S THE PESTILENTIAL NUISANCES WHO WRITE FOR AUTOGRAPHS -
ALL PEOPLE WHO HAVE FLABBY HANDS AND IRRITATING LAUGHS -

FORSTER trails off.

ADAM (cont'd)

What? What happened? I didn't skip a line, did I?

FORSTER

Whoa. Where did that come from?

ADAM

W-- We---

FORSTER
Never mind. You're a freshman?

ADAM
Y- Yes.

FORSTER
Trimstig says you're a choral and orchestral man.

ADAM
I've v- very interested in c- c--- classical music.

FORSTER
Any reason why singing in particular?

ADAM
It's the only th- thing I d- don't st- st- STAM-mer at.

FORSTER
Makes sense. Stammers aren't written in music. Have you always had that stammer?

ADAM
S- Since f-fifth grade.

FORSTER
Ah. Any substantial singing experience?

ADAM
I always sang b-barbershop with my uncles at Christmas. They'd drag me into the kitchen and I'd j- just have to woodshop it. Would have been easier if I knew the words.

FORSTER
Helps.

ADAM
They told me to try it at least once. Mom told me to come here today. I j- just waited around until the library closed before I came h- he- HERE!

Pause.

FORSTER
I'll give you a chance.

ADAM
W- W- W-!

FORSTER
Don't fly into an epileptic fit, little boy. Since you didn't fill out my earlier form, I need your personal information.
(Over enunciating for effect.)
"Zoo-klan, A-dam"

ADAM

Y-Yes.

FORSTER

You a fan of spare ribs?

ADAM stares back at him.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Didn't your mother ever read you the Bible, little boy? The Good Lord took one of Adam's ribs, created Himself woman and the pain hasn't stopped since.

ADAM

W-W---W----, W-ell-

FORSTER

Just give me your address.

ADAM

Th-three zero zero t-two Crane Avenue.

FORSTER

Area code?

ADAM

F-f-four, s-s-six, th-th-

FORSTER

Calm down. Go slower.

ADAM

F-four, six-

FORSTER

Calm down.

Four - six - th-ree - t-two - four.

FORSTER

That's better. See you tomorrow at high noon!

FORSTER gets up from the piano.

ADAM

So I'm i---i--in now?

FORSTER

Don't tell anyone until high noon tomorrow. Were you expecting something else?

ADAM

Th-Th-Th---Thank you, M-Mr. F-Forster.

FORSTER

Call me "Forry." It's nothing.

ADAM

This r-really means a lot to me.

FORSTER

And I am right, and you are right-

ADAM gets his things together to leave.

ADAM

AND ALL IS RIGHT TOOLOO-RA-LAY-

FORSTER

AND I AM RIGHT-

That's enough Mikado for one day. We could do this until the cows come home. Good night, Adam Zuklin.

ADAM

Thank you, Mr. Forster.

FORSTER

Forry, little boy.

ADAM

Forry.

FORSTER

Thank you. Good night!

ADAM exits. FORSTER chuckles to himself.

FORSTER

Not every kid age sixteen can summon Gilbert and Sullivan from memory at will. Hell, I can't think of anyone my own age who can. I figured I would give this kid a chance. No harm. There were much worse in the ensemble anyway.

SCENE THREE: REJOICE IN THE LAMB

Some weeks later in March. FORSTER is busy leading a student choir in Benjamin Britten's "REJOICE IN THE LAMB."

FORSTER

Now: "Let Nimrod the Mighty Hunter-" Stop! Stop! My sainted mother's spastic colon has more rhythm than that. Britten's rolling over in his grave. It goes: Let NIM-rod THE MIGHT-Y HUN-ter.

He pounds the rhythm of the line out on the piano.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Stop! Stop! Perhaps I haven't been clear. This is the sloppiest it's ever been. Okay. There are five ways of doing things at Thomas Jefferson High School: the kid way, the wrong way, the Jefferson School way, the right way and the Forster way. The Forster way is always the best. Now, let's take the words of Christopher Smart loving set by Benjamin Britten. Smart's words are not normal. (Reading.) "Let Ithamar minister with a chamois, and bless the name of Him that clotheth the naked." Let's face it: they're weird. Weird. They're all words written by a madman scratching into the wall of his prison cell in England. But that is why they're brilliant. It's pure insanity. Pure... joy. This was a man who loved his God so much he'd drop down in the middle of the streets of London and offer praise for some baby that sneezed or some horse that had a bowel movement. Everything was a glorification of something greater. There has to be joy! I don't care whether it's a broken desk or some weed out on the tennis courts: it's BEAUTIFUL! GLORIOUS! There's leaping joy in the poetry. Dancing! Frivolity! Jollyness! "Let ITH-a-mar MIN-i-ster with the CHAM-ois!"

He checks the time.

FORSTER (cont'd)

All right, rascallions. We're done for today. We'll take it from the top tomorrow. Keep practicing rhythms. Those consonants have to be crisp!

The sound of shuffling feet comes and goes. FORSTER makes sure he is alone. He takes some sheets of sheet music out and begins to pound out something on the piano. The piece isn't blessed, and neither is his playing. He makes several mistakes.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Son of a bitch.

He takes a pencil and erases a significant portion of one phrase. He frantically scribbles a revision, and then plays it, faring slightly better. He releases his frustration by hitting several sour chords, also heralding ADAM's arrival.

ADAM

Forry?

FORSTER

(Hiding the manuscript.)

What is it? Oh. You. What do you want? Where were you for today's rehearsal?

ADAM

I t- t- told you that I h- have Acad- Academ- (Slap.) Academic Bowl on Tuesdays.

FORSTER

Oh. That's right. Well, see if you can't get out of some those meetings.

ADAM

Y- Yes sir.

He begins to leave.

FORSTER

(Sighing.)

Wait, Adam. Come back.

ADAM turns back.

FORSTER (cont'd)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you.

ADAM

I'm s--- s----- s-

FORSTER

Don't give it another thought.

ADAM

Is there something wrong?

FORSTER

No. I'm just a little preoccupied at the moment.

ADAM

(taking off his backpack.)

Do you have time to-

MR. KARON, the janitor, enters with a large box on a dolly.

KARON

Ring-a-ding, Mr. Forster! Got a little present for you.

FORSTER

Mr. Karon, it's always a present when you arrive.

KARON

That's mighty kind of you there, sir. It's a heavy one this time.

FORSTER

Well, I'm ordering music in bulk now before the Fat Man in the main office slashes budgets again.

KARON

Oh, is he that starting up again?

FORSTER

Adam, cover your ears. By the way, Mr. Karon, this is Adam Zuklin.

KARON

Howdy there.

ADAM

H-- Hello.

FORSTER

What I was saying was, word is Old Man Jones downtown is cutting whole programs out of the budget and Mr. Hall is getting ready for a blood purge. I know he told Molly Markles that art classes would start getting cut unless enrollment goes up. Mr. Hall can't stand her enough as it is. In conciliation, Trimstig and I decided to only do one musical a year in addition to two concerts. I'm already doing the work of eight people.

KARON

Trimstig told me he's ready to retire.

FORSTER

The old bastard should. He's been doing the same old hack concert for the past forty years. I may not have many years left.

KARON

No one can ever work as hard as you do.

FORSTER

Thank you. Make sure they write that on my tombstone.

KARON

(Laughing.)

Will you be here late again tonight?

FORSTER

Yep. Boosters meeting.

KARON

Well, tell them the new alarm is in the hallway. I know you don't need to be warned, but...

FORSTER

I will spread the word, sir!

KARON

Thanks.

FORSTER

Adam, there is a pair of scissors in my back office. Be a good boy and go fetch them.

ADAM makes to exit.

KARON

(Offering his hand.)

Nice to meet you again, sonny.

ADAM

(Shaking it.)

N- N- Nice to meet you.

ADAM leaves to fetch the scissors.

KARON

I'll be seeing you, gents.

FORSTER

Thank you, Mr. Karon. See you later!

KARON exits. ADAM returns with the scissors.

ADAM

What's in the box?

FORSTER

(Slicing the top open.)

The death mask of Marie Antoinette from Madame Tussaud's. (To ADAM's puzzled face.) It's just music. For the Great Forry Library.

ADAM

There's a library in here?

FORSTER

(Pointing.)

In there. That Black Hole of Calcutta.

ADAM

What's that?

FORSTER

A prison cell in India where they held over a hundred prisoners and they all died of suffocation or stomping each other to death.

ADAM

Oh.

FORSTER

One of these days I need to get in there and organize it. Hasn't been touched in years.

ADAM

Do you n- need help?

FORSTER

I need more months in the year, little boy.

ADAM

I can do it.

FORSTER

Don't worry about it. Keep to your Academic Bowl.

ADAM

Are you sure? I c- can be of use to you.

FORSTER

Is there more to you than your mellifluous voice? Can I trust you to do a good job and not mess things up and leave a disorganized mess for old Mr. Forster to clean up?

ADAM

You can trust me.

He glances at the piano.

ADAM

Are you writing something?

FORSTER

(Hiding his manuscript.)

Yes. I'd appreciate privacy around here, little boy. (To the audience.) You keep out too.

ADAM

I'm s-- sorry. I'll leave you alone.

ADAM exits without a word. FORSTER goes back to work on his score.

FORSTER

My friends, this composition is something very special. Unborn as yet, but many years in the gestation.

It awaits its moment. Its time will come. So, the spring moved along and we approached the final throes of the year. The spring concert was imminent, and Mr. Zuklin landed himself the solo in "Rejoice in the Lamb," along with Mr. Derek Liserdoni.

SCENE FOUR: PRACTICE

ADAM and DEREK Liserdoni are standing at the piano with FORSTER. They rehearse solos for "Rejoice in the Lamb."

FORSTER
Once more, Adam. Until you get it right.

ADAM
"FOR THE FLO'ERS ARE GREAT BLESSINGS"

FORSTER
Stop! Flat, little boy. Still flat. Flat.

ADAM
S---- sorry.

FORSTER
We've got to put you on hold for a second. Liserdoni here needs to go to baseball practice. We'll run through his really quick.

LISERDONI
It's no rush, Forry. Give Adam time.

ADAM
P--- P--- please. Go ahead.

LISERDONI
Very well.
"FOR H IS A SPIRIT AND THEREFORE HE IS GOD.
FOR K IS KING AND THEREFORE HE IS GOD.
FOR L IS LOVE AND THEREFORE HE IS GOD.
FOR M IS MUSICK AND THEREFORE HE IS GOD."

FORSTER
(Singing the next choral line.)
"AND THEREFORE HE IS GOD."
Good. Maintain support. And really savor those vowel sound.
"SPIRIT. KING. GOD." All that. Another magnificent job, my man Derek.

A loudspeaker voice cracks to life.

LOUDSPEAKER
Mr. Forster?

FORSTER

Yes?

LOUDSPEAKER

You have a call on line three.

FORSTER

Thank you. Adam: stick around. Be right back.

LISERDONI

Thanks, Forry.

FORSTER

You are welcome.

FORSTER exits to his office. DEREK puts his music in his backpack.

ADAM

S-- S-- sorry for taking up your time.

DEREK

Don't worry. He used to rag my ass like that when I was a freshman. It's his method. You know he studied for a bit at that, um... Royal Music University Somethingorother in London.

ADAM

You mean the Royal College of Music? Forry?

DEREK

Yeah. Doesn't like to advertise it. I mean he is stuck here.

ADAM

I understand.

DEREK

You've got a good voice, man. Don't sweat it.

ADAM

Th-- Th-- thanks.

DEREK

All right, friend. (Shakes his hand.) See you around. Watch out for the old man.

ADAM

Goodbye.

DEREK exits.

ADAM (cont'd)

Friend.

FORSTER enters with a sigh.

ADAM

Is everything okay?

FORSTER

Trust G. Schirmer to get my shipping address wrong. After some hundred-odd orders. Are you ready now?

ADAM

Y---- Y---- Yes.

FORSTER

Now there's a reason I'm hard on you. Do you know why? Because I want you to be the best. I never want you to compromise. You're very smart and I know with your report card you'll be president by the time I'll be pushing up daisies, which'll be here in a couple of weeks if I'm any judge of horseflesh. I have faith in you to do well.

ADAM

Th--- Th--- Thank you.

ADAM disappears.

FORSTER

Of course I push them hard. Have to. Discipline is the key to success. Everyone stumbles, but it's a real man who can pick himself up and move on from it. Life rewards those who can do for themselves, although sometimes it's a slap in the face.

SCENE FIVE: TIRELESS TEACHER

MRS. Jane HALL, teacher at Jefferson School and wife of the principal, stands at the podium. A banner proclaiming "FACULTY RECOGNITION DINNER" hangs above her.

MRS. HALL

It is a Jefferson tradition of recent years to select one member of the Jefferson faculty and staff for recognition of their outstanding and tireless devotion to making Thomas Jefferson School a better place for students, faculty and parents. As recipient of last year's "TIRE"less Teacher Award, it is my honor to present his year's award to Mr. Glen Forster.

Sounds of applause. FORSTER enters in an awkward old suit. MRS. HALL takes his award out from under the podium: an old car tire spray-painted and decorated garishly for the occasion.

FORSTER

Thank you, Mrs. Hall. (To the audience.) The principle's wife. Not a woman to easily take on: a tufted peacock who's vision rarely ventured beyond the tip of her wart bespattered nose.

MRS. HALL stands off to the side.

FORSTER

I'd like to thank Mr. Hall for bestowing this award on me and I will sleep soundly knowing finally that I possess a former part of his Corvette convertible.

Jolly laughter from the crowd. MRS. HALL approaches the podium.

MRS. HALL

Just for clarification, we do not use our old tires, we buy them new.

FORSTER

I know. I can use this to fund my 401-K.

More laughter. MRS. HALL turns bright red.

FORSTER

I'm just joking. I'm just joking. I would just like to express my gratitude at receiving this award. I know we are all hard workers and this award belongs not only to me but to all the faculty at Jefferson.

Loud applause. FORSTER exits. MRS. HALL returns to the stand. Sniggers abound.

MRS. HALL

That concludes the evening's program. A nice and safe summer to you all.

FORSTER is now alone.

FORSTER

Just because it's summer doesn't mean I stop working. They're all off sun bathing in Bimini and I'm wasting away here in my cinder block hell for little extra pay. This summer had the added benefit of a massive elm tree coming down on my house. At least I didn't have to stay here. But the odd thing was Adam came to school. Every day to see if I was there. At least he had a sense of duty. Or maybe was just lonely. Any how, the next year, his sophomore year, took off and he was back working with me. Not so much anymore during the week because of homework, but usually on the weekends.

SCENE SIX: WET SATURDAY

A low rumble of thunder. FORSTER sits at his piano, working on his "composition." Someone pounds at the door. FORSTER stares at it. He goes to a high window and peaks. There is another pound. FORSTER sees who is outside and flings the door open. ADAM enters from the exterior door with a bike. He is drenched.

FORSTER

Zuklin? What are you doing here?

ADAM

Y-- Yes? S--- sorry I'm late. R-- R-- rain.

FORSTER

You didn't have to come today. Get that jacket off before you catch cold.

ADAM

I'm s-- sorry if I interrupted you.

FORSTER

I'd hit a stumbling block anyway. Funny you should show up. I have a surprise for yo.

ADAM

Wh- Wh- What is it?

FORSTER

I was going to wait until Monday when you'd usually show up, but now's as good a time as any. You know I trust you very much.

ADAM

Yes, sir.

FORSTER

And while you may not have the most gifted voice, your mental talents far outdo anyone in my choirs.

ADAM

Th- thank you.

FORSTER

And in honor of your dedicated work in organizing and maintaining all that there is around here that I don't have time for, I'm giving you these.

FORSTER hands him a set of keys.

ADAM

Wow.

FORSTER

Now I trust you to respect this privilege, right?

ADAM

Yes, sir. Are you sure I can have these?

FORSTER

If the Fat Man in the main office finds out, it'll be my neck. No one can know you have them.

ADAM

What keys?

FORSTER

Exactly. This is the key to the outside, this is the crash bar for the outside door, this is the key to the main door, this is the key to the library, this is the key to my office, this is the key to the storage room. Can you learn them?

ADAM

I'll learn them.

FORSTER

Good. You're a good worker. Don't let this become some booby-hatch. No orgies or meth labs in here on the weekends. Got it?

ADAM

Perish the thought.

FORSTER

Good. You are mine now!

FORSTER grabs ADAM with a big hug. He holds it for a second too long. He releases ADAM, who steps back and stares at him. ADAM smiles and gives him a big hug back. FORSTER smiles peacefully for the first time.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Careful now. The Fat Man in the office has his Molestation Alarm.

ADAM

Can I ask you a question?

FORSTER

Do we have time for breaks when there's work to do?

ADAM

Can I ask you a question?

FORSTER

Is it about my religion?

ADAM

No.

FORSTER

Is it about my political affiliation?

ADAM

No.

FORSTER

Is it about my sex life?

ADAM

N-No.

FORSTER

Then you may proceed.

ADAM

Are you- are you married?

Pause.

FORSTER

Not at the moment. There's only one woman for me and I'll never have her.

ADAM

Who?

FORSTER

Miss Titilations down at the strip club. One of my wild women!

There is an exchange of nervous laughter.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Does that answer your question?

ADAM

Y-yes. Thanks.

FORSTER

Adam, that wasn't fair of me. No, I'm not married. I was married some years ago. Long before I ever came back to teach here. We got divorced. Why?

ADAM

No reason. Just curious.

FORSTER

Curiosity killed the cat, little boy.

ADAM

I kn- know.

FORSTER

(Kidding him, perhaps
tickling.)

Why do you want to know? You want to walk me down the aisle,
little boy?

ADAM

No. Stop it!

They kid. ADAM laughs. FORSTER smiles.

ADAM

Can you finally tell me what you're working on?

FORSTER

Just a little cantata.

ADAM

What's it about?

FORSTER

The story of Saint Sebastian.

ADAM

Who?

FORSTER

He was an early Christian martyr. His aura cured many from
muteness.

ADAM

Appropriate for musical treatment.

FORSTER

Yes. The emperor Diocletian, who was a big old bastard,
condemned him to be chained to a post and pierced with
arrows, but miraculously he survived. He was rescued by Irene
of Rome and bitched out Diocletian before he was finally
beaten to death.

ADAM

Wow. How long have you been working on it.

FORSTER

Years. Ever since college. Never satisfied with it.

ADAM

I'm sure you'll finish it one of these days. Well, work to do.

He exits to the library. FORSTER turns to the audience.

FORSTER

Right. Married? Why would he want to know that? I didn't lie. I was married. Once. Many years ago. Two foolish people in love. Or so I thought. It was not to be. No matter how hard I tried, it would not be. I hadn't been with someone, in any sense, for years.

FORSTER stares after ADAM.

FORSTER

Well, work to do.

FORSTER sits back down at the piano, working on "Sebastian." ADAM enters with a stack of papers.

ADAM

Do you want sacred music next to show choir arrangements?

FORSTER

Bach will be waiting for you in hell. Stick show choir in the very back. I don't do it because I like it.

ADAM

Okay.

ADAM retreats back to the library.
FORSTER works in solitude before ADAM emerges once more.

ADAM (cont'd)

Hey, um, I wanted to tell you-

FORSTER

(Striking a bad chord in frustration.)

What?

ADAM

N--- Never mind. I d---- ----- ---didn't m---- mean to d--- --
-

He retreats.

FORSTER

Adam. Come here.

ADAM

Y-- Yes?

FORSTER

I'm sorry I snapped. I'm just a little frustrated.

He places his hand on ADAM's shoulder.

FORSTER (cont'd)

You know I'm always anxious to hear what you have to say. Not many people can carry on a conversation about the succession of the English kings like you do.

ADAM smiles. FORSTER laughs.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Now what was it, little boy?

ADAM

Finally saw "The Third Man" last night.

FORSTER plays a few bars of "The Third Man Theme" on the piano.

FORSTER

Damn that zither.

ADAM

Exactly. No one in my family liked it, but I knew you'd appreciate it.

FORSTER

One of Orson Welles' last good ones before he went off and got fat.

ADAM

Did you know Orson Welles dated Eartha Kitt?

FORSTER

I remember that. Before that, he was married to...to...I can't remember.

ADAM

Oh, wait. I know who you're talking about. She was-

FORSTER

Tall, redhead.

ADAM

Good dancer.

FORSTER

Sang "Put the Blame on Mame."

ADAM

Oh...dammit!

FORSTER

(Marking to remember.)

"One night she started to shim and shake--"

ADAM

"That brought on the Frisco quake."

FORSTER

Damn, it's on the tip of my tongue!

ADAM

Why can't I think of it?

FORSTER

Rita Hayworth!

ADAM

That's right, Rita Hayworth.

FORSTER

How did we miss that?

ADAM

Beats me.

FORSTER

"Mame did a dance called the hitchy-coo..."

ADAM

"That's the thing that slew McGrew!"

FORSTER

Churchill will try singing that song for an audition some day soon.

ADAM

He says that his mother claims he came singing and dancing out of the womb. Do you think he'll make it out in the world?

FORSTER

Well, he'll sing and dance his way into being a drag queen in Cal City or some such God-awful fate. You have nothing to worry about.

ADAM

Thanks.

ADAM puts his hand on FORSTER's shoulder. They hold each other in silent adoration.

FORSTER
Work to do, little boy.

ADAM
Right.

ADAM exits.

SCENE SEVEN: BAD WRITING SAMPLE

ADAM enters the choir room, furiously
wielding an assignment. FORSTER is back
at "Saint Sebastian."

FORSTER
What's the matter now, little boy?

ADAM
I hate Mrs. Hall. And stop calling me "little boy," okay?

FORSTER
You'll always be a little boy if you keep pouting like that.
What did "Big Bad Jane" do to you?

ADAM
A "D" on this writing sample. I'll kill her for this. I don't
get D's.

FORSTER
All right, all right. Calm down.

ADAM
You don't understand. I always get a perfect score. Ever
since third grade. An unbroken r- record! And here's a good
question-

FORSTER
Is it about my religion?

ADAM
No.

FORSTER
Is it about my political affiliation?

ADAM
No.

FORSTER
Is it about my sex life?

ADAM
Stop it.

FORSTER

All right.

ADAM

What is the p-purpose of these lovely "writing" exercises in every class now?

FORSTER

Reading, writing and problem solving across the curriculum. The Fat Man in the Main Office said everyone should be writing in every class, and we must obey. Even in advanced choir, which you should take.

ADAM

I don't have time for it next semester. I've told you before. I have to take P. E. then.

FORSTER

Psh. They'd chew you up and spit you out.

ADAM

Thanks.

FORSTER

I'm telling you. Start lifting weights, push-ups, sit-ups, crunches, the whole shebang.

ADAM

I'm not worried about that at all right now. I need to figure out how to get this revised so that Fruma-Sarah will give me a passing grade.

FORSTER

Do you need me to help you? I can help you proof.

ADAM

No.

FORSTER

Why not?

ADAM

Well, that's cheating-

FORSTER

No, it's not. You'll still write the damn thing. I'll just give my advice. You need to start opening your self-critical eye. I can think of a certain little boy who's been very willful and presumptuous lately.

ADAM

I know. I know! And I am not little.

FORSTER
Pssh. Come here, make a muscle.

ADAM
There.

FORSTER
Look at that. Pitiful.

ADAM
Stop it. I'll write it myself.

FORSTER
Stubborn, stubborn.

ADAM
Would you really help me?

FORSTER
Sure. You have to do a sample on your sustained silent reading for the week, right?

ADAM
Yep.

FORSTER
What're you reading now?

ADAM
Thomas Mann's Death in Venice.

FORSTER
(Correcting his pronunciation.)
"To-mass Monn." Say it after me.

ADAM
(Now correct.)
Thomas Mann.

FORSTER
Good. Bring in something Saturday morning and we'll go over it.

ADAM
(Turning to leave.)
Okay.

FORSTER
Hey. Don't let it get you down. At least there's something you're not good at.

ADAM smiles weakly.

FORSTER (cont'd)
Something else bothering you?

ADAM
No.

FORSTER
Don't lie to me, little boy. I know a sour puss when I see it.

ADAM
It's nothing.

FORSTER
Come on. What is bothering you? (Pause.) You can tell me what it is.

ADAM
It's a secret.

FORSTER
Ooo. I just love secrets.

ADAM
Please don't make it a joke.

FORSTER
Okay. Okay. Tell me when you're ready.

SCENE EIGHT: ANOTHER WET SATURDAY

ADAM enters and FORSTER plays "Hab' mir's gelobt" from DER ROSENKAVALIER.

ADAM
Hey, Forry. Sorry I'm late. Ma was giving me shit-

FORSTER
The cat died this morning.

Pause.

ADAM
What?

FORSTER
Yep. Found him. Stiff as a board on the dining room floor.

ADAM
I'm sorry. What-What did you do with him?

FORSTER
Double bagged him and tossed him in the dumpster out back.

ADAM

What?

FORSTER

Double bagged him and tossed him in the dumpster out back.

ADAM

Isn't that some sort of health violation?

FORSTER

The cat won't care.

ADAM

Good Lord. Which one was this?

FORSTER

This was George.

ADAM

So it's just Bartholomew left?

FORSTER

Yeah. Figures that the evil, smart one would last the longest. He's a lot like you.

ADAM

I'm sorry.

FORSTER

It's all right. Were you being shitty to your mother again?

ADAM

No, she's just-

FORSTER

Just what?

ADAM

She's, I don't know, not happy about all the time I spend here.

FORSTER

Well, you don't need to be here every night and weekend.

ADAM

But the thing is, I want to be here. That's what I told her. You need someone here to help you and I'm the only one.

FORSTER

She is your mother and you need to obey her.

ADAM

And my dad isn't much better.

FORSTER

He's a big strapping man, isn't he?

ADAM

Yeah. I've always gotten along better with my mother than my father. We're cut from different, very different cloths. I'm kind of a disappointment to him.

FORSTER

You know he still loves you, as trite as that may seem.

ADAM

Only as much as his duties as a father make him.

FORSTER

Well, my father was the same way. Tell a man back in '65 that you want to go to school to be an singer. The old fuck said, "The hell you are. You're gonna be a dentist." Can you see me reaching into people's mouths?

ADAM

I think you'd make Doctor Mengele look good.

FORSTER

Right, and when I said, "No," the old man threw me out. Said he'd never pay for a such a waste of money. So I went to work in the mills and a lot of other shitty jobs just to get through college.

ADAM

You worked in the mills?

FORSTER

Yes.

ADAM

What was that like?

FORSTER

Dirty and nasty.

ADAM

I could never do that.

FORSTER

Never say never, little boy. You'll regret it one day. I did. The mills and a dozen other godless places. Never any solace: work, work, work, work. Then I got stuck here.

ADAM

Why did you decide to teach?

FORSTER

It was the best option at the time. Couldn't get any work, so I took the best course open to me. What's the secret?

Pause.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Come on, tell me.

Pause.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Adam, you don't have to hide anything from me. You know that. This isn't about some crime or something, is it?

ADAM

No.

FORSTER

Then what is it?

ADAM

I'll ph- phrase it as I have an intense admiration for someone.

FORSTER

All right. Who?

ADAM

Someone you know. It's Liserdoni.

FORSTER

Oh. What a strange Saturday this has become. I didn't mean to be insensitive but-

ADAM

Don't tell anyone.

FORSTER

Not at all. Not at all. This is private matter of course. I respect you're right to privacy. I can... understand what you're going through.

ADAM starts to sniffle.

FORSTER

Now, now. None of that. Come on. Stiff upper lip, little boy. That's it. Now, never ever let your personal life drown you. Find comfort in your other obligations. Did you bring your Tho-mass "Man" paper?

ADAM

G- Got it here. Thank you.

They sit at the piano, FORSTER marking in red ink as they read it aloud together, original text in single quotes, rewritten text in double quotes.

FORSTER

(Scribbling.)

First off: if we're going to keep doing this, you need to write larger and on every other line in blue or black ink. No pencil. Do you get the idea?

ADAM

Yes, I do.

FORSTER

Very good. We'll fix your heading later. So: 'Repression is the primary ill affecting Gustav von Aschenbach, the protagonist anti-hero of the Thomas Mann novel Death in Venice.' You don't need 'anti-hero' and titles are underlined. Not in quotes. Do you understand?

ADAM

Yes.

FORSTER

'Frustrated by the listlessness of his own art as a writer, he takes a holiday to Venice. While there, he becomes fixated on the unrepressed avatar of beauty and Dionysian desire: Tazio, a young Polish aristocrat boy of 13 staying in the same hotel as Aschenbach at the Lido.' I would spell out "thirteen." Do you under-

ADAM

Yes. The motif is now clear.

FORSTER

Tolerance, little boy. Tolerance. I wouldn't say that Aschenbach's art is necessarily 'listless.' "Sterile" is a better word.

ADAM

But- That's fine.

FORSTER

What?

ADAM

Personal choice. I can respect that.

FORSTER

Good. 'You cannot help but pity Aschenbach.' "One cannot help but pity Aschenbach." 'He is a lonely man, and Mann makes him as much the victim of circumstances as does Tadzio. Obsession mutating into love is a dangerous thing....'

ADAM

Something wrong?

FORSTER

Uh, no. I'm just a little light headed. Breakfast was a long time ago. It's time for lunch.

ADAM

Okay. Where?

FORSTER

Let's just drive for a bit. Let's see what we find, Tadzio.

He gives ADAM another hug.

FORSTER

Tadzio.

SCENE NINE: HOME SWEET HOME

ADAM and FORSTER appear in FORSTER's car.

ADAM

Is that your house?

FORSTER

Yep.

ADAM

Looks small.

FORSTER

One and a half stories. Just snug enough for one. Maybe two.

ADAM

Looks real nice. You can tell that's your house.

FORSTER

Thanks.

ADAM

That's a nice garden you have.

FORSTER

Takes a lot of work.

ADAM

I can imagine.

FORSTER

Yep. Don't have much help when you live alone.

ADAM

Oh. Really?

FORSTER turns off the car. A pause.

ADAM (cont'd)

Something wrong?

FORSTER

Oh, nothing. (Beat.) Would you like to see inside?

ADAM

What?

FORSTER

Just the one cat in there. Nothing to worry about.

ADAM

Uh. No.

FORSTER

No?

ADAM

We have a lot of work to do.

FORSTER starts the car making a face.

ADAM (cont'd)

Are you mad at me?

FORSTER

No. Not all. It's nothing.

FORSTER starts the car up.

ADAM

Are we going back to school?

FORSTER

No.

ADAM

Okay.

FORSTER

We're making a pit stop.

ADAM

Where?

FORSTER

Koonz's Music. Down on 173rd.

ADAM

Oh. What are we doing there?

FORSTER

Can't I stop where I want to?

ADAM

Y--- Yes. I'm sorry.

SCENE TEN: MARKET

ADAM and FORSTER enter the inside of Koonz's Music Store. It is a dim and musty hovel of many printed, vinyl and plastic secrets. CHARLIE Koonz stands behind the counter. ADAM and FORSTER enter.

FORSTER

Afternoon, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Glenny! Haven't seen you in a while. Who's the kid?

FORSTER

This is Zuklin. First name: Adam.

CHARLIE

Nice to meet you, sonny.

ADAM

N-- Nice to meet you too.

CHARLIE

Glenny, what can I do you for?

FORSTER

I'm in need of something special. Any new arrivals for me?

CHARLIE

Burning a hole on my shelf as we speak. Be right back.

CHARLIE exits. ADAM walks around in awe at all the books and albums.

FORSTER

Don't touch anything.

ADAM

I wasn't. There's a lot of stuff here.

FORSTER

They've been here since the forties.

ADAM

Whew! It's dusty.

FORSTER

That's the magic of this place. Never been cleaned or substantially inventoried. Something's always turning up. We used to come down here and get 78s after we'd save up all our pennies-

ADAM starts to rifle through a few CDs.

FORSTER (cont'd)

I thought I told you not to touch anything.

ADAM

Sorry. I saw something.

FORSTER

(Coming over to him.)

What is it?

ADAM

"Wagner's Greatest Hits."

FORSTER

Oh, please. Not that bombastic anti-Semite.

ADAM

He wrote the music that was in "What's Opera, Doc?"

FORSTER

"Kill da Wabbit! Kill da Wabbit! Kill da Wabbit!"

ADAM

I'm getting this.

CHARLIE re-enters with an old LP.

CHARLIE

What's "this?"

FORSTER

The young man here wants to get a cheap compilation of Valkyrie tunes.

CHARLIE

Not a bad start.

FORSTER

Just get ready. You'll hear the same piece of music over and over for hours and get nowhere. Except maybe hearing loss.

CHARLIE

No Britten this time, Glenny. But I managed to get this: the old Adler recording of Mahler's Third. First ever recording of the piece. Good condition, too.

FORSTER

I'm not usually a Mahler man unless there's Scotch involved, but what the hey? There's a little bottle in the cabinet that needs to get used up tonight.

CHARLIE

And for the little man, here?

ADAM

This please.

CHARLIE

That'll be eight sixty-five please.

ADAM starts to go through his wallet for change.

FORSTER

Wait a sec. I've got this one.

ADAM

You d- don't have to.

FORSTER

I've ragged you all day. Time to atone.

CHARLIE

Eight sixty-five, Glenny.

FORSTER

There you go.

CHARLIE

Thank you very much, gents. Come back soon.

SCENE ELEVEN: ONCE UPON A DREAM

FORSTER is alone.

FORSTER

(Removing his glasses.)

I felt it. Deep inside me. I was inexplicably happy and morose in one thought. I fluttered. There was a pulse within. A strong pulse. I told him to go home. I didn't need him that afternoon. I'd correct the paper myself.

I wasn't feeling well. I gave him any excuse. I just had to be alone. I went to the stereo and tried to find something. Just something that could get this thing out of me. It was driving me crazy. I needed music: Mahler's Third. I only drag Mahler out when it's bad. It was the fourth movement, for soprano voice. Mahler had set a Nietzsche poem to music. The Midnight Song from Zarathustra. "O Man! Take heed! What says the deep midnight? 'I slept, I slept-, from a deep dream have I awoken:- the world is deep, and deeper than the day has thought. Deep is its pain-, joy-deeper still than heartache. Pain says: Pass away! But all joy seeks eternity-, -seeks deep, deep eternity!' I fell asleep at the piano. An uneasy sleep. And then- And then, he- came to me. In the dream. He was there in the room. He was naked. I remember that. And he walked up to me. He took off my glasses. And he said:

ADAM (O.S.)

I am here for you.

FORSTER

"You mean that?" I said. And again he said:

ADAM (O.S.)

I am here for you.

FORSTER

I think I cried.

ADAM (O.S.)

I love you.

FORSTER savors the moment, then
shudders. Convulses.

FORSTER

"I love you!" Just a dream. A dream, a fantasy, something which will never be. Something that was never there. A phantasm. My own lust. It would never work, I am too old, he is too young. A sick and twisted old fool. Love's plaything. I tried to shrug it aside, but it was too much. I wasn't going to fool myself that I didn't feel anything for him. What were you thinking Adam? What was going on in that head? Adam? Adam? Adam?

Blackout.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO:

SCENE ONE: AN EXPERIMENT

FORSTER's living room. On the walls and furniture are musical objects and books by the score. A large CD collection and stereo sits to one side. FORSTER stands at a drink rack feverishly pouring himself a gin and tonic.

FORSTER

This is one of my least favorite parts of the story. Deep breaths, Glen. Deep breaths. They're will be no traces. Just an experiment. No traces. No evidence. No one will know he was here. It's not murder or some other crime. We're all free individuals. Aren't we? And this means nothing. Nothing about me. I'm not anything. I am Glen Forster. And I will still be Glen Forster. Just an experiment. Just an exper-

The doorbell rings.

FORSTER

Adam, please don't hate me.

FORSTER downs his drink and goes to the door. He cannot open it. The bell rings again. FORSTER closes his eyes and opens the door. An attractive male HUSTLER stands outside in denim attire.

HUSTLER

You Gustav (Mispronouncing) Ass-chen-bach?

FORSTER

Y- Yes. Aschenbach. Come right in. Sorry to keep you waiting.

HUSTLER

At least you had the balls to open the door. Most guys chicken out.

FORSTER

Here. Let me take your jacket.

The HUSTLER smiles and removes his jacket. He hands it off to FORSTER with a lingering playfulness. He chuckles nervously. He puts the jacket away. He invites the HUSTLER to sit. The HUSTLER does, leaving his legs wide open.

FORSTER

Most men don't open the door?

HUSTLER

They chicken out. But I say, hey. It is what it is. Isn't it, Mr. Aschenbach?

FORSTER

Isn't it?

HUSTLER

(Moving closer.)

Or can I call you "Gustav?"

FORSTER

Would you like a drink?

HUSTLER

Sure.

FORSTER

What'll you have?

HUSTLER

Have any champagne?

FORSTER

N- No. I'm terribly sorry. I- I- I'm not acquainted with what one... what kind of one liquor one procures for these events.

HUSTLER

I was just joking. I'll take some of that Tanqueray.

FORSTER

A man after my own heart.

Pause.

FORSTER

Well, is this your full... time job?

HUSTLER

It's a living. But enough about me. I know practically nothing about you.

FORSTER

Well, I'm a... a music man.

HUSTLER

I can see. Lots of CDs you've got here.

FORSTER

Yes, I've collected them for many years-

HUSTLER

(Taking his drink.)

Is this your first time-

FORSTER

Yes. Yes, it is. I'm sorry. I just- I just.

HUSTLER

It's okay. Some men just wait until later. It's no big deal. I've had older and younger.

They sit on the couch.

FORSTER

I appreciate you're understanding.

HUSTLER

So... music...

FORSTER

Yes. Do you play an instrument?

HUSTLER

I can think of a couple.

FORSTER

I doubt you're a fan of classical, then?

HUSTLER

Everything, man.

FORSTER

Well, classical is my specialty. I understand that these matters must be discrete, but I am music instructor of sorts. I take great privilege in inspiring others-

In one swift move, the HUSTLER kisses him.

HUSTLER

I know. (Pause.) Do you have all classical here?

He gets up and goes to the CD shelves.

FORSTER

Mostly.

HUSTLER

Oh! What's this?

He takes one CD off a high shelf.

HUSTLER

I didn't know Madonna lived three hundred years ago.

FORSTER

That was for a research project. About the Roman Catholic iconography present in Madonna's songs. For a certification class.

HUSTLER

Oh, so you're a teacher?

FORSTER

...Perhaps.

HUSTLER

Well, let's shake up tonight's lesson plan, shall we?

The HUSTLER pops the CD into the player and selects his track: "La Isla Bonita." He takes off his shirt and dances for FORSTER. FORSTER sits entranced for a long time. He eventually stands up and approaches the HUSTLER. He awkwardly attempts to mimic the HUSTLER agile and sinewy moves. When a copulatory pose is reached, FORSTER lets out a cry. He runs to the player and turns it off. He takes out his wallet.

FORSTER

Here, take it. Take it all! Please, just leave! Leave now! Nothing personal! Just please!

HUSTLER

Jesus Christ, man, relax.

FORSTER

(Tearing in desperation.)
Just please leave! Please!

HUSTLER

All right. All right. No charge.

The HUSTLER exits. FORSTER locks the door behind him and sinks to the floor. He is near breakdown.

FORSTER

No one will know. If the neighbors ask, I'll just say it was a delivery man. Late night, um... sandwich! Something! They won't bother to ask me. No one will know. I used a pay phone on the other side of town. If he comes back, I'll deny it all. Never knew him. Adam, you'll never know. I sent him away. I would have- but only with you. You. My Tadzio. Gustav Aschenbach. Ha! Adam-

He laughs. Then he cries.

FORSTER

I'll take up Wagner as penitence.

SCENE TWO: MR. HALL'S RAMPAGE

FORSTER's classroom. Rodney HALL enters. FORSTER is wildly air conducting the climax of the prelude to Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde" to a recording.

HALL

Mr. Forster. Mr. Forster. TURN OFF THAT RACKET!

FORSTER

Good morning, Mr. Hall.

HALL

Can I have a word?

FORSTER

Certainly.

HALL

Word in the hallways is that there are some untoward things going on back in your classroom.

FORSTER

What "things" are you talking about?

HALL

Certain things going on between you and Adam Zuklin.

FORSTER

I have no idea what you're talking about-

HALL

Have you been intimate with him?

Pause.

FORSTER

What?

HALL

I'll tell you right now, I don't have any evidence, but I won't tolerate any of that. If I ever, for one single moment, get a single solid piece of evidence, it's your ass. This is a warning. I'll let the school system, the parents and the law pick their teeth with you if you fall out of line. Is that clear?

FORSTER

I don't believe this. Sir, I've been here thirty years, ten longer than you and I-

HALL

Is that clear?

FORSTER

(Taking a deep breath.)

Yes, sir. Though no such activities carry on, I will endeavor-

HALL

You'll ensure.

FORSTER

-Ensure that they don't.

HALL

Good. I trust we won't have to have this conversation again.

FORSTER

None, sir.

HALL

Good. And just so you know, the Superintendant sent me a long letter about spiralling arts costs. You and Trimstig have to decide whether its the spring concert or the spring show.

FORSTER

But-

HALL

No arguments. Decision. Five o'clock. Friday. No exceptions.

FORSTER

No, sir.

HALL

Thank you, Mr. Forster. Remember: you are an educator, not a corruptor.

FORSTER

Thank you, sir.

HALL exits. FORSTER steadies himself.

FORSTER (cont'd)

He told. Adam must have told someone. How could he? Nothing had happened. Nothing. Nothing! I was innocent in action. But I was guilty in thought. Adam didn't come around that day. Maybe he ran into Hall storming back to his office, or who knows. He kept away for almost a week. No rehearsals. Not a thing. It killed me. Almost killed me. Until another wet Saturday. He came back.

I was working on Sebastian- oh, that damn piece was killing me. Every night I had a new dream. A new one. Adam chained to a pole. Naked. Helpless. I was the Roman centurion who drew the bow and arrow. And I pierced him. Thousands of arrows and every time he cried out my name to stop it. But I couldn't. That's when I heard the outside door open and close.

ADAM reappears.

ADAM

Hey, Forry.

FORSTER

Hello.

A pained pause.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Lock the door.

ADAM

What? Why-?

FORSTER

Lock that door.

ADAM

What happened?

FORSTER

Do it. Now.

ADAM

Okay!

ADAM exits. Pause. ADAM enters.

ADAM (cont'd)

Are you-?

FORSTER

Who have you been talking to?

ADAM

What?

FORSTER

You heard me.

ADAM

I haven't been talking to anyone.

FORSTER

The Fat Man came back here and practically handed me my walking papers this week.

ADAM

What?

FORSTER

It's not fair.

ADAM

What is?

FORSTER

It's just not fair.

ADAM

What did he say to you?

FORSTER

I just-

He kisses ADAM. A pained pause. ADAM kisses him back.

FORSTER (cont'd)

I love you.

ADAM

I...love you too.

They embrace.

SCENE THREE: A SERPENT IN PARADISE

FORSTER sits at the piano with LISERDONI. They finish rehearsing "Quoniam" from Bach's Mass in B Minor.

FORSTER

You know what's worse than too much counterpoint?

LISERDONI

What Forry?

FORSTER

Too much Protestant counterpoint.

LISERDONI

Then why did you pick it?

FORSTER

It's the Mass in B Minor. It's a weakness.

LISERDONI

Hey, Forry. Can I ask you a question?

FORSTER

Is it about my religion?

LISERDONI

Not about any of that stuff. It's that Zuklin kid.

FORSTER

Yes?

LISERDONI

Don't get me wrong. I like the kid. He's real smart and an okay singer and all that. But, it's like, I get the feeling he's always following me around. I couldn't shake him after I got out of Zimmer's class.

FORSTER

Oh.

LISERDONI

I mean, should I be worried? Is there something weird about him?

FORSTER

Well, you might say that he looks up to you.

LISERDONI

Yeah?

FORSTER

You're a hero to him. Whether or not something else exists, I can't say.

LISERDONI

Okay. Can you-

FORSTER

I'll find out what's going on. He's a good kid. Just doesn't fit in much of anywhere. He needs a friend.

LISERDONI

Thanks, Forry.

FORSTER

You are welcome.

LISERDONI exits.

FORSTER

I did some "divining," by which I mean I dashed Adam's hopes. Not outright. I just Liserdoni was a little put off. "Keep your distance," I told him.

That was enough to get him off the trail for a bit. Hey, I did what I had to do. For me. All's fair in love and war. Adam and I kept up our little affair. Our relationship moved along at a snail's pace, but Adam went along, to a certain point. Every Saturday afternoon, because I knew the building would be totally empty, I'd ask: Can we consult the library? And silently he'd take my hand and off we went. But everyday I sounded the horn and the Wall of Jericho didn't come a'tumblin' down. It wasn't fair. If I could've cast these urges off, I would have. But I can't. I won't. I refuse to. So I stopped thinking about his feelings entirely. It had to be. It would be.

SCENE FOUR: ANGRY CHURCHILL

FORSTER

We came to a new school year. I was in bliss. Adam was mine. I had fallen completely. So completely that I based everything in that year around Adam. As much as I could without drawing undue attention. He was my soloist of choice, much to the chagrin of Mr. Churchill.

CHURCHILL enters. FORSTER holds takes a letter out of his pocket. He tosses it on the table between them.

FORSTER (cont'd)

You decide how this goes. I won't say a single thing.

CHURCHILL

I wrote that letter to Mr. Hall because everything in it is true. I don't think you're a good teacher. I think you're mean and unsupportive of your students, especially me, and that you favor people who frankly don't deserve all the glory and good parts.

FORSTER

Okay. Can you give me some specific examples?

CHURCHILL

I don't have to. Adam Zuklin had every tenor solo last year, and now you're saying he'll be the lead for the fall concert piece?

FORSTER

I try to be fair and impartial. Mozart is not your natural idiom, so I gave you the all the show choir tenor spots.

CHURCHILL

That's a load of shit.

FORSTER

Well, here's news for you. The game is set up so that I win. Those who do quality work and are not prima donas reap good rewards. I don't know what else I can do with you. Disappointment will be no stranger to you. I will take your comments into consideration when I determine new assignments for the spring. Fair?

CHURCHILL

Fair.

FORSTER

Good. I will let Mr. Hall know that we talked. And watch your language.

CHURCHILL crosses to the door.

CHURCHILL

My mother said she's not going to be a booster parent anymore if this keeps going on.

He exits with great consternation.

FORSTER

How ever will I survive?

FORSTER sits back down at the piano. He begins to play some music for Saint Sebastian. ADAM enters, looking radiant. Manhood has begun to settle in.

ADAM

What just happened?

FORSTER

Her Majesty was upset about assignments. The Queen is dead. Long live the Queen!

ADAM

Thanks for that.

FORSTER

Just joking.

ADAM

How is "Sebastian" going?

FORSTER

I hope I can get it done by spring.

ADAM come around to look at the score on the piano, draping his arms around FORSTER's neck.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Watch it.

ADAM

What?

FORSTER

It's only after three. People are still walking around the building.

ADAM

Relax.

FORSTER

Last thing I need is the Fat Man to come in here and walk in on us.

ADAM

You always worry. (Reading the score, humming to himself.) Interesting. I do believe I detect a little hint of Herr Wagner in your orchestration.

FORSTER

Don't you dare say I write like that bastard. It's Monsieur Berlioz, if you most know. It doesn't make sense to have one of the best high school brass ensembles in the state and not make use of them.

ADAM has gradually begun to massage
FORSTER's shoulders.

ADAM

And offstage brass?

FORSTER

A tribute to Herr Mahler.

ADAM

Where did you get the idea for this whole project?

FORSTER

From an old stained glass window at Old St. Victor's Church. Something very plaintive in the face. Youth spoiled. Something like that. Don't we have a coaching session?

ADAM

If we must-

CHURCHILL bursts through the door.

CHURCHILL

For- Oh. Excuse me. Am I interrupting something?

FORSTER

Just a coaching session on breathing exercises, Mr. Churchill. How may we accommodate you and your untimely interruption?

CHURCHILL

I forgot.

FORSTER

Really?

CHURCHILL

Oh yes. Bye.

He exits smirking.

FORSTER

What did I tell you?

ADAM

What? I'm sorry?

FORSTER

You fool. If he saw you touching me, hell will break loose.

ADAM

Look, Forry, relax. It's nothing. Why are you getting so worked up about it?

FORSTER

You don't get it, do you? My ass is on the line. There are a lot of things behind closed doors you don't know about. Where are you going?

ADAM

I just remember an errand I have to run. I'll be back tomorrow morning.

ADAM grabs his things and makes for the door.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Hey! Where are you- never mind.

ADAM

What?

FORSTER

Never mind.

ADAM

WHAT?

FORSTER

Saint Sebastian is almost done. I want to premiere it at the spring concert. Would you want to sing his part?

ADAM

I guess.

FORSTER

O- Okay. We'll start work on that then instead of the Grimes aria. I think I may have been pushing too hard.

ADAM

Don't baby me. I can do whatever you need. Bye.

FORSTER

Wait!

ADAM

WHAT?

FORSTER walks up to ADAM and gives him a kiss.

FORSTER

I love you.

ADAM

...I love you too.

FORSTER

Don't leave in a huff. Stay a while. What's wrong?

ADAM

It's Liserdoni.

FORSTER

Ah.

ADAM

He's graduating this year and I haven't told him a thing.

FORSTER

I've mentioned your hero worship to him several times. I understand. There was a Derek in my life once.

ADAM

Who was he?

FORSTER

Guy who went to Bloomington with me. We sat next to each other in Bach choir. Blonde hair, whole works. After exams and juries, we'd go to the cheap, trashy porno theatre just to give our minds a chance to expurgate themselves.

ADAM

Oh.

FORSTER

Nothing ever happened. He went off. Got himself married, last I heard.

ADAM

Do you think Liserdoni will end up the same way?

FORSTER

Probably. It's okay. You'll always have me.

ADAM

Thanks, Forry. I'm sorry I lashed out. I've just been really-

They embrace. ADAM's back to the audience. FORSTER begins kissing ADAM, at first hesitantly then more vigorously. ADAM does nothing. He moves down ADAM's neck. ADAM does nothing.

FORSTER

I won't give you a hickey.

FORSTER gives a weak smile. ADAM does nothing. After a few more kisses, FORSTER removes ADAM's shirt. He begins to kiss his chest. ADAM does nothing. FORSTER undoes ADAM's belt buckle and removes it with a flourish. He undoes ADAM's jeans and pulls them down. ADAM is naked from the rear and does nothing. FORSTER begins to feel his genitals. ADAM takes a deep breath.

ADAM

Mr. Karon could be in the building.

FORSTER

There's nothing going on in the building today. I checked.

ADAM

Mr. Karon could be in the building.

FORSTER

But-

ADAM

Please.

FORSTER backs up in resignation and surveys ADAM as he puts his clothes back on.

ADAM (cont'd)
I'd like to wait a little while longer.

FORSTER
That's okay. You shouldn't feel rushed.

ADAM
Don't hate me.

FORSTER
I could never hate you.

ADAM
I just... Just be patient.

FORSTER
A virtue I hold dear.

ADAM gets his things. FORSTER stands by the door. ADAM starts to go through the door when FORSTER grabs him and kisses him. On the mouth. ADAM leaves.

SCENE FIVE: POST-FACULTY MEETING

A conference room at Jefferson. MRS. HALL and FORSTER are the only visible faculty members.

MRS. HALL
And we put it to vote: all those in favor of adjusting the fine arts scheduling block to accommodate time for sustained silent reading, say aye.

A chorus of "ayes" respond. FORSTER says nothing.

MRS. HALL (cont'd)
All those opposed?

FORSTER
Nay.

MRS. HALL
Once more, Glen, you force the measure into discussion.

FORSTER
I will only say that it does do a single kid a single bit of good to have fine arts restricted more than any other. Take it out of homeroom time.

MRS. HALL

The committee has already prescribed a list of activities to be done in homeroom to enhance progress. I don't understand why you're holding out, Glen.

FORSTER

If we proposed to cut back on time for history classes, I estimate your "hold out" response would be somewhat comparable.

MRS. HALL

Glen, time has to come from somewhere. Either you consent to this decision or we politely ask for your resignation from this committee. Again.

FORSTER

Very well, Madam President. Aye.

MRS. HALL

I think that concludes our meeting, ladies and gentlemen. See you next week.

The conference room clears.

MRS. HALL (cont'd)

Just a minute, Glen.

FORSTER

What is it, Madam President?

MRS. HALL

I do not appreciate that tone, Glen. Especially with as many young faculty members as we have on this committee.

FORSTER

Just expressing the deference due to a woman of your stature, Jane. Albeit with a small twist of mirth and frivolity.

MRS. HALL

Save the ten dollar language.

FORSTER

Very well.

MRS. HALL

I also don't appreciate that as co-chair of this committee, you lately seem to get a big kick out of opposing all of my proposals.

FORSTER

Nothing personal.

MRS. HALL

Oh really?

FORSTER

Just inviting some friendly debate. It's often over a hairline issue, Jane.

MRS. HALL

Glen, you are obstructive and an ass. I've told Charles never to put us on another committee together.

FORSTER

Now that wounds me, Jane. Deeply.

MRS. HALL

Your assistants are taking after you.

FORSTER

What assistants?

MRS. HALL

That dark haired kid with the stutter.

FORSTER

Zuklin?

MRS. HALL

Yes. That one.

FORSTER

What has he done?

MRS. HALL

Last week I caught him using the copy machines. Now this morning I caught him going through your mailbox. Completely inappropriate for a student. I told him to put it back and leave the office. He's not allowed to do it anymore.

FORSTER

That one was my fault, Jane. I sent him up there. He's a good kid. He's not about to start rifling through faculty mail.

MRS. HALL

I don't care. It's a breach of the student-faculty relationship. Pretty soon they'll all be rifling through the mail.

FORSTER

I would say that sounds a bit extreme.

MRS. HALL

No arguments, Glen. They're already a lot of things floating around here about you and that Zuklin boy.

FORSTER

To which I challenge anyone to present a shred of evidence. You or any other pompous-

MRS. HALL

That's it, Glen. We have nothing more to discuss.

She grabs her papers and storms from the place.

FORSTER

Ah, good riddance, you fat, bloated bitch.

SCENE SIX: AD HOC LOVERS

FORSTER sits at the piano. "Sebastian" is before him. ADAM enters.

ADAM

Hey, Forry.

FORSTER

You're late.

ADAM

I'm sorry, I... I wasn't aware you could be late volunteering on a Saturday.

FORSTER

I was waiting for you.

ADAM

I'm sorry if you expected me earlier.

FORSTER

I love you. I love you. Come here.

ADAM

I love you too.

He goes to FORSTER and embraces him.

FORSTER

I apologize. It's been a tough week.

ADAM

Has something happened?

FORSTER

Faculty bullshit. I haven't been sleeping well, either.

ADAM

Nightmares?

FORSTER

Just more dreams about you. I think we need to consult the library.

ADAM

What?

FORSTER

I think we need to consult the library.

ADAM

For what- Oh. That.

FORSTER

That? Come on, little boy. Is today going to be the day? Is that Wall of Jericho there gonna come tumbling down?

ADAM

Not today.

FORSTER

Damn! I'm getting impatient, little boy.

ADAM

I'm not little anymore.

FORSTER

I know some of that from experience.

ADAM

Glen-

FORSTER

Why so formal?

ADAM

Nothing. Just nothing. Why can't you think of me for once? Why?

FORSTER

I do all the time. That's my problem. Just come here and hug me. Please. Please!

ADAM doesn't move.

FORSTER

Then get out. GET OUT!

ADAM exits through the exterior door.
FORSTER weeps.

FORSTER

I can't take it anymore. I can't!

SCENE SEVEN: A SHORT SHARP SHOCK

The office of principal Rodney HALL.
HALL sits behind his desk. FORSTER
knocks on a door.

HALL

Come in.

FORSTER enters.

FORSTER

You said you wanted to see-

HALL

Sit down.

FORSTER

Yes, sir.

HALL savors a long silence. He stares
FORSTER down.

FORSTER (cont'd)

What is something urgent?

HALL

You might say that.

FORSTER

Well, what is it?

HALL

You're out, Glen.

FORSTER

Out? Out of what?

HALL

Your classroom, title and place here at Thomas Jefferson High
School. You're fired, Glen.

FORSTER

What?

HALL

Not effective immediately. You are desert these premises at
the end of this year. With severance I may add. Too good of
old Jones downtown.

FORSTER

Fired? One what grounds?

HALL

This.

He slams a stack of papers on his desk.

HALL (cont'd)

The superintendant has "with reluctance" ordered all principals citywide to eliminate one sector of their fine arts programs. Naturally, I choose you.

FORSTER

You son of a bitch.

HALL

Ordinarily, you'd be reprimanded for that. But, I'll let you fume.

FORSTER

You can't do this to me.

HALL

I can do whatever I like. The game was, and for that matter, is set up so that I win.

FORSTER sits back in his chair.

HALL (cont'd)

I'm sure retirement will deal kindly with you.

Pause.

HALL (cont'd)

Forster?

Pause.

HALL (cont'd)

You're not crying are you, Forster?

Pause.

HALL (cont'd)

I'm sure you can use all that sheet music of yours as kindling.

Sustained pause.

HALL (cont'd)

You've still got your concert.

FORSTER stands and exits. HALL starts to laugh. As he fades from view, his laughter echoes maniacally in the dark.

SCENE EIGHT: AGNUS DEI

FORSTER

"Lamb of God" (Pause.) "-who taketh away the sins of the world, grant them eternal rest." I waited until Monday. Just waited. I didn't even go home. I just sat there. At the piano. The score for Sebastian sat in front of me. The notes just stared at me. Accusing. Laughing. Sobbing. All for naught. All for naught.

With violence, he eviscerates the score.

FORSTER (cont'd)

Take away the sins of the world!

ADAM enters. He sees the shreds of paper.

ADAM

What's happened? What's all this? Is this your score? Why'd you rip it up? What happened Forry?

FORSTER

The world doesn't deserve it.

ADAM

Doesn't deserve what?

FORSTER

I'm not going to be here next year.

ADAM

Why what's happened?

FORSTER

I got fired.

ADAM

What?! Why?

FORSTER

Budget. Necessary elimination.

ADAM

They can't do that.

FORSTER

It's done. I'll just have to make a living on three hundred a week. Fuck Hall. This is shit. Shit!

FORSTER knocks a stack of books off the piano.

ADAM

Stop it.

FORSTER

What?

ADAM

Stop it. This isn't like you. You're scaring me.

FORSTER

You damn well ought to be scared. Adam, I won't be around anymore! We won't be together.

ADAM

Forry, it won't be so bad.

FORSTER

Adam, do you know how much you mean to me? Do you know how much risk I've taken for you? Adam, I love you. And what do you do? Deny me at every turn.

ADAM

Well, you could never be content with chastity. (Pause.) You had to make it cheap, and to your detriment. I loved you, yes. But not the way you wanted.

FORSTER holds out his hands.

FORSTER

Come here.

ADAM

Why?

FORSTER

Just, just come here. I need-

ADAM

No. You're not going to pull that shit. "Come here." I know what'll happen. It'll be the same old backroom shit as before. I'll never let myself do that again.

FORSTER

Stop, little boy.

ADAM

And for the last time, quit fucking calling me that! I am not a little boy anymore. Not as you wanted it. You hugging on me, rubbing up against me, kissing-

FORSTER

Stop it!

ADAM

And me, just biding my time every day in that backroom, hating every minute of it. Want to know what I really did all those Sunday afternoons in that black hole? I kept looking at that big shelf of books on the wall. Book after book after book. It was all I could do. Reading and memorizing titles, just to keep myself sane. I even remember all of them-

FORSTER

No. This was never about your body. It was your soul. I fell in love with that. We were both born in the wrong age at the wrong times.

ADAM

(Getting close.)

Yes. And you've realized that too late.

ADAM kisses FORSTER. A pause.

FORSTER

What was that for?

ADAM

Just to make sure of something.

FORSTER

What?

ADAM

Just to be sure you repulsed me as you did before.

FORSTER

I- Where are you going?

ADAM

Away. I don't like it here anymore.

FORSTER

Goddamn you.

ADAM

Goddamn you.

FORSTER

I'm sorry.

ADAM

What?

FORSTER

I'm sorry.

FORSTER starts to kiss ADAM.

FORSTER (cont'd)

I love you.

ADAM

Don't. Stop. Please. Stop. I'm not-

FORSTER

I think you just need a release. I do.

ADAM

No, please.

FORSTER

No. You're not going to lead me on any more-

ADAM

Please, Forry, no. I couldn't.

ADAM pushes himself away.

FORSTER

But-

FORSTER grabs ADAM and drags him offstage. Darkness. There is a rustle of belt buckles and muffled screams. Then a small whimper. Then footsteps. Then a door shutting. FORSTER appears, now zipping up his pants. He falls down to the ground sobbing. CHURCHILL bursts on the scene.

CHURCHILL

Good morning, Forry!

FORSTER

Yes, Mr. Churchill. How may I help you?

CHURCHILL

I wanted to talk to you about the spring show. How can a guy like me get a good part?

FORSTER

Get out.

CHURCHILL

Hey, do you know why Adam Zuklin left?

FORSTER

Leave.

CHURCHILL

Why?

FORSTER

I said GET OUT!

CHURCHILL

Jeez, calm the hell down old man. What, did you two have a big fight?

FORSTER

NOW!

CHURCHILL exits. FORSTER stares after him. Then he slumps into his chair and sobs into his hands.

FORSTER

Churchill found me that Monday morning. And by that time, I'd made up my mind. There was nothing to hold me back. Churchill, Liserdoni, Hall... Adam. All of them. I'd had enough. So I went through my morning classes as usual. Then for lunch, I took a detour. To a gun shop. Brought it back with me. Then at two o'clock, there was a knock on my door. I opened it to find Hall standing there with two police officers. I understood. I dismissed my class without a word and asked for a minute to collect my things in my office. I was already dead by the time they broke down the door and found my brains all over my scores. It'll be some funeral. I can't think of a single soul that will go to it once this gets leaked.

EPILOGUE: BENEDICTUS

The scene from the Prologue emerges:
ADAM at the organ and FORSTER at the coffin.

ADAM (cont'd)

(Looking at FORSTER.)

"In pace requiescat." May he rest in peace.

FORSTER

I'm sorry. Adam. I'm sorry!

ADAM

(Chanting.)

In paradisum deducant te Angeli:
in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres,
et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Ierusalem.

FORSTER climbs back into the coffin,
sobbing, repeating his apology over and over.

FORSTER

I'm so sorry, Adam. I never meant to hurt you. I'm so sorry.

Death at Jefferson, 5/3/2010, 71.

FORSTER closes the lid on himself. ADAM
takes up the cart.

ADAM

Let us go in peace.

Deep bell tones sound. ADAM rolls the
casket off.

END OF PLAY.

Artist's Statement: *Death at Jefferson*

Death at Jefferson began life as a one act play for my THEAT 340: Playwriting course in Spring 2009. It was later revised and submitted to the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Regional One Act Play Competition in Saginaw, Michigan in January 2010. It was a co-finalist for the national competition at the Kennedy Center. The choice of *Death at Jefferson* as the subject for my thesis sadly meant that two other projects were put to the wayside. My initial proposal of a play based on the making of Solti/Decca *Ring* cycle was set aside in favor of an abortive play about Merlin. This too was set aside after I discovered that *Death at Jefferson* did not make it to the National Competition. I had not touched the play since it was submitted back in January, but many ideas were still percolating. With the consent of my thesis advisor Jennifer Blackmer, who also advised *Death at Jefferson* throughout the entirety of its existence, I set out to expand *Death at Jefferson* from a one act to a two act play and to give it a public reading and talkback session, which took place on Friday, April 30, 2010.

Death at Jefferson is the most personal piece of work I have attempted at Ball State University. Its story of an intimate and somewhat abusive pederastic relationship between a teacher and a student is based on experiences from my own life. Aside from the therapeutic value of turning it into a play, I realized that it was a compelling story. One of my primary goals was not to paint the character Glen Forster, the aggressor and abuser, as a two-dimensional villain. Part of the coping process for me was to understand the viewpoint of the abuser and its various shades. I did not set out to vindicate or condemn, but merely to present a conflicted and complex character. This choice has received enthusiastic response at all readings of the play. Professor Beth Turcotte, in whose acting class I first publicly opened up about this story and who is very militant about violence against children, confessed to me that she could not hate Forster.

Many of the choices surrounding Forster's character supported this neutral stance. First is his last name "Forster," the same as E.M. Forster, the celebrated English writer and scholar who kept his own homosexuality hidden from the public. Forster is a music teacher with a predilection for the works of composer Benjamin Britten, who had and maintained platonic relationships with young boys. Forster in fact rehearses Britten's cantata *Rejoice in the Lamb*, and in a cut scene, rehearses "Now the Great Bear" aria from *Peter Grimes*, an opera about a man accused of inappropriate relationships with his apprentice. At the midpoint of Act One, the student, Adam Zuklin, brings a writing sample to Forster for him to correct. The sample is an analysis of Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice*. The protagonist of the novel, writer Gustav von Aschenbach, is taking a holiday in Venice when he becomes fixated on a young Polish aristocrat boy named Tadzio. Forster openly recognizes the connection between Aschenbach and himself, especially in how conflicted they feel about encountering the Dionysian emotions alien to them as ascetics.

The characterization of Adam Zuklin is partly autobiographical, especially in the case of his stammer, something which has afflicted me for many years. I was able to use it as a device in the story, in that the more confidence and guidance Adam receives from Forster the less he stammers. The nature of Adam's character arc, especially his own infatuation with fellow student Derek Liserdoni, needs to be fleshed out in relation to the main relationship, if only as a foil.

Many elements of the play have changed between its various incarnations. Forster was originally a high school theatre teacher. I was never completely satisfied with this choice since I dislike "plays about people who do plays" and I knew there were other possibilities within the range of my own experience. Forster's occupation changed in successive versions to an English teacher, and finally, a choir teacher. The relationship between the two main characters blossoms out of the time they spend alone together in the school, and as I have known many overworked choir teachers, it seemed the most acceptable alternative. Previous drafts also contained hints of Forster's

relationships with other male students. These become more concrete in later versions, but were dropped from the final thesis reading. Comments from the talkback session have convinced me of the value of including some hints of these relationships, but keeping them ambiguous.

Another element that has changed significantly is the framing device whereby the story is told. In the one act versions, the story was told by the dead Forster directly to the audience at his funeral, where Adam gives the eulogy. The early writing for this device was awkward, so I amended it to include a confessor/priest figure, but then dropped this device as well, as many respondents to pre-reading drafts stated that they missed the introspection and character development seen in Forster via the monologues. They were reinstated to varying degrees of success. The current opening of the play also does homage to the film *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* with Adam as the Apparition emerging from below stage flamboyantly playing “War March of the Priests” on an organ. Several comments were raised about whether or not both Adam and Forster were both dead at the beginning, a possibility I never even considered. Redefining the nature of these moments will be the next major revisionary step for this play.

One of the most successful devices in all incarnations is the character of the Male Chorus. This choice spawned out of necessity when we were instructed in Playwriting to keep cast size to a minimum. Since Forster and Adam are the central characters, the Chorus functions as a voice of the world outside of Forster and Adam’s relationship and functions well through one actor. Coincidentally, Benjamin Britten’s operatic version of *Death in Venice* employs similar doubling. Several new characters for the Chorus, such as Mrs. Hall and the nameless Male Hustler, were added to flesh out Forster’s character. The relevance of these moments to the main story line of Adam and Forster needs to be considered further.

I consider the two act version a moderate success. The goal of a complete two act play was part of earlier thesis topics. After receiving comments at the talkback session about the intensity of

the one act form, the next stage of revisions will reduce the play to an extended one act, making the it roughly ninety minutes long. As with any work of art, it is still a work in progress. I have learned much from this process and will continue to revise itm with intentions to see it produced professionally in near the future.